



North Dakota Small Organized Schools

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Chairmen Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Michael Heilman and I am the Executive Director of the North Dakota Small Organized Schools (NDSOS). Transportation is not an issue for just our small schools, it is a significant expense for all school districts providing transportation. The 154-member schools of NDSOS reflect most of the smallest and a few of the larger districts in the state.

The funding level in section 1 subsection 1 of HB 1027 is identical to the funding level from the 2019 and 2017 legislative sessions. This is understandable given the current economic climate; however, transportation expenses continue to increase. The included tables reflect the historical funding for transportation and comparative funding for foundation aid from 2009 to 2021. State support for transportation goes back many decades and has gone from a high of 69.14% (92-93) to about 40% in recent years a decline of nearly 30%. At the same time the state support for all programs (pupil aid, transportation, career and technical education, special education and other) has increased to about 60%.

NDSOS supports HB 1027 but would ask the committee consider language that would allow districts to have their payments based on the last year of complete data, the 2018-2019 school year or the prior year whichever is greater. NDSOS feels this adjustment is needed and the data provided supports that the 2019/2020 school term busing data was significantly impacted by schools being closed to face-to-face instruction after March 13. Also, many districts’ transportation data for the current school term will be impacted due to hybrid learning models that were in place for a significant part of this school year. NDSOS supports language that would allow district transportation payment to be calculated reflecting the anomaly that COVID 19 has created for the past two school terms. That language would read as follows:

for the 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 school years, ridership and mileage payments shall reflect the better of the 2018-19 school year or the prior school year, whichever is greater.

Thank you Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee.

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The mission of NDSOS is to provide leadership for the small/rural schools in North Dakota and to support legislation favorable to their philosophy while opposing legislation that is harmful.